

REMARKS

The Communication of January 18, 2007 has been reviewed and the Examiner's comments carefully considered. Claims 17, 28, 31, 36, 38 and 41 are amended by the present Amendment. Support for these amendments can be found in the specification and drawings as originally filed. No new matter has been added. Claims 18-26 and 33 were withdrawn from consideration by the Examiner in view of an earlier restriction requirement. Accordingly, claims 17, 28-32, 34-36 and 38-44 are pending in this application, and claims 17 and 36 are in independent form.

In the Communication of January 18, 2007, the Examiner contends that amended independent claims 17 and 36 are directed to an invention that is independent or distinct from the invention originally claimed because the amended limitation recites the "cylindrical sleeve having an axial slit" and is a distinct species of the originally presented claim. The Examiner further contends that since an action on the merits for the originally presented claims has already issued, the invention of the originally presented claims has been constructively elected by original presentation for prosecution on the merits, and the allegedly distinct species of claims 17 and 36 are withdrawn from consideration.

The Applicant would like to thank the Examiner for the courtesies extended to Applicant's representative during the telephonic interview of January 25, 2007. During the interview, the Applicant's representative requested that the Examiner clarify the Communication. The Examiner indicated that by replacing "axial" with "longitudinal" in claims 17 and 36 in the Amendment of October 19, 2006, the scope of the claims was broadened. The Examiner further contended that an "axial slit" could be interpreted as both a slit that extends along the length of the cylindrical sleeve and a slit that extends around the circumference of the sleeve.

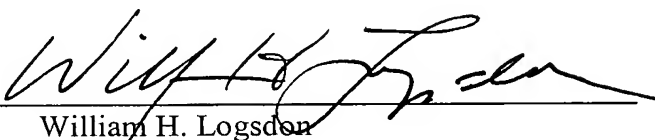
The Applicant would like to note that he disagrees with the Examiner's interpretation of the word "axial". The Applicant believes that an "axial slit" and a "longitudinal slit" are equivalent. Additionally, a slit that extends around the circumference of the sleeve would be characterized as a "circumferential slit", not an "axial slit". However, in order to expedite prosecution, the Applicant has amended claims 17, 28, 31, 36, 38 and 41, to replace "axial slit" with "longitudinal slit".

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Accordingly, based on the foregoing amendments and remarks, the Applicant respectfully requests examination of the pending claims on the merits and allowance of pending claims 17, 28-32, 34-36 and 38-44.

Respectfully submitted,

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